

Harvard Allston Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Monday, July 10, 2006
Honan-Allston Library
6:30 p.m.

I. Attendance:

Harvard Allston Task Force

Paul Berkeley
Cathy Campbell
Rita DiGesse
Brian Gibbons
Michael Hanlon
Millie Hollum McLaughlin
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone

Boston Redevelopment Authority

Gerald Autler
Linda Kowalcky

Harvard University

John Audi
Harris Band
Jim Barrows
Nathalie Beauvais
Will Donham
Chris Gordon
Lauren Marshall
Dave Moffatt
Andy O'Brien
Dan Rabinovitz
Alison Reinhardt
Kathy Spiegelman
Maile Takahashi

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. Gerald Autler introduced Chris Gordon, Chief Operating Officer for the Allston Initiative at Harvard. Chris said that he has spoken with Harvard's interim President Derek Bok and the plans for Harvard's development in Allston will continue to move forward despite the departure of former President Larry Summers's and the current absence of a permanent President at the University.

Kathy Spiegelman, of Harvard University, introduced Stefan Behnisch, the architect for Harvard's science complex in Allston, who was at the meeting to present initial design concepts that he and his team have come up with. Kathy stressed that what Behnisch presents is not final design concepts but first thoughts to share with the Task Force and community members as the design team goes along. Kathy encouraged Task Force members and audience members to share their questions and comments.

Stefan Behnisch shared his presentation. Summarizing highlights included:

- The design concepts are still a work in progress because he and his team are still trying to accommodate the programming of the building.

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- The four buildings that will be a part of the first science complex will be a mixture of sizes, similar to the sizes of Harvard's buildings now.
- The main entry to the complex will be at the corner of Western Ave. across from the back corner of the Charlesview apartment's lot. This will be an animated place.
- Pedestrians will be able to enter the science yard at various entry ways through greenway connections.
- The ground floor of the buildings will be filled with different uses such as conference centers, retail, and cafeterias.
- There will be a way to travel between each of the four buildings.
- The buildings will have what are being called "winter gardens" which will be common spaces within the buildings.
- The first building will set the tone for the Allston campus.
- The building will be a sustainable building. The architects are aiming for a LEED rating.
- The height of the buildings will be lower towards the Allston neighborhood and higher on Western Avenue.
- The buildings are modern lab buildings and the façade will reflect the uses in the building.
- The buildings will not all look the same and rather will be a "family" of buildings.

Questions and Comments:

Paul Berkeley: One of the pictures illustrates truck access and day care access at the back side of the complex. Is the access through the neighborhood? It looks like the day care access and truck access are relatively close, will that be safe?

Stephan Behnisch: No, the neighborhood is 1 block south from the truck access. The team is still investigating where the best location for the truck access is. Truck access can't be on Western Avenue because it will slow traffic. The day care center is far enough away from the truck access that there will not be any conflicts with trucks.

Ray Mellone: How will you handle pedestrian and local traffic for the people who want to go to the uses on the ground floor? What will the appeal be for people?

Kathy Spiegelman: Open space passageways will be created for pedestrians to access the uses. The uses will not be all retail. The idea is to create a lot of public activity, retail and other public uses at Barry's corner. Since the neighborhood is several blocks away we'll have to create inviting paths to bring pedestrians to this area.

Harry Mattison: Harvard should keep in mind the businesses at Allston Village when deciding what kind of retail will be on the ground floor. A lot of small business are already struggling and don't want big retail chains coming into the neighborhood.

Kathy Spiegelman: The retail will be inviting but will not be a destination that will draw away from the Allston Village.

Cathy Campbell: Where is Windom Street on the plan Stefan presented? It looks like there is a new road on the plan? Where does the new road go through?

Kathy Spiegelman: Windom Street is not on the maps that we have with us tonight. At the next meeting Harvard will bring updated transportation materials for the Master Plan that clearly detail where Windom Street is in relation to the new bypass road.

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Cathy Campbell: How are vehicles going to come off the turnpike ramp and make the turn onto the bypass road if it is before Windom Street? Vehicles already have a hard enough time making the turn onto Windom Street with the way the turnpike ramp is set up now.

Paul Berkeley: It looks like the bypass road runs parallel to Windom Street.

Harry Mattison: It goes through the former Pepsi site.

Ray Mellone: Do trucks have to cross Windom Street to access the site?

Harris Band: Access to the bypass road is East of Windom Street. Vehicles will be able to make the turn off the turnpike ramp. It won't be too close to the bypass road.

Ray Mellone: Will there be a heavy flow of trucks and vehicles coming in and out of the site and buildings?

Chris Gordon: The lab trucks won't be that frequent but they will be big that they will need dedicated truck access. Harvard can develop a profile of the kinds of vehicles that will be coming to the site and the frequency based on our knowledge and experience with the labs in Cambridge.

Mike Hanlon: Do you anticipate the trucks bringing in and out hazardous materials?

Chris Gordon: We are still working out the science program that will go into the new science building, but any chemicals that will need to be delivered to Harvard will be handled similarly to chemicals in Cambridge, which has been very successful. As we have more information we will share it with the neighborhood.

Mike Hanlon: Does the plan call for taking down the WGBH overhead bridge?

Chris Gordon: Yes, but the plans haven't been finalized. Preparation would probably take place during the day and it would come down and be cleared up over night.

Mike Hanlon: Do you anticipate a new MBTA bus stop on Western Avenue?

Kathy Spiegelman: There will be a Harvard shuttle stop on Western Avenue that the public can use. It will be up to the MBTA if they want additional bus stops.

Paul Berkeley: Where is the science complex going to pull electricity from?

Chris Gordon: We just started having those conversations with NSTAR and are discussing a few options.

Harry Mattison: In conversations I've heard it's not going to be generated by NSTAR. NSTAR said you would do it.

Chris Gordon: That wasn't my understanding from NSTAR. There will be some generators on site and co-generation but there won't be enough power available for the whole complex.

Kathy Spiegelman: The issue is thresholds. Ultimately whatever is done, the understanding is that the spin-off will be positive and beneficial and actually increase the reliability of the power supply in the neighborhood.

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Paul Berkeley: Have your engineers studied this? There have been explosions at the NSTAR facility in the neighborhood. Can we get some more information on the utility plan?

Chris Gordon: Yes, we can have representatives who are working on the utility master plan come to one of the Task Force meetings. The utility master plan includes water, sewer and power.

Paul Berkeley: Will the science building have any interesting building or design elements that we haven't seen before?

Stefan Behnisch: Yes, for example if you look at the Genzyme building in Kendall square, there are structures called solar chimneys. It's not a stack but more of a ventilator for the building. There will be many sustainability elements that will be incorporated into the building.

Harry Mattison: Will the building have any green roofs?

Stefan Behnisch: Yes, there will be "winter gardens" within the building.

Gerald proposed to Task Force members the idea of touring the Genzyme building or some of Harvard's other green buildings. Kathy explained that she tried to arrange a tour for the Task Force members earlier in the year but the problem is that Genzyme can't provide tours of the building in the evening after normal working hours and therefore many task force members would be unable to attend. Several of the Task Force members have also already toured the Genzyme building. Stefan said that when he comes back to another Task Force meeting and there is more time on the agenda he will explain some of the design concepts for sustainability more thoroughly.

Cathy Campbell: In the presentation some of labs are designated as High Tech/Low Tech. What does that mean?

Stefan Behnisch: It is just a distinction of the different technical requirements for the various science initiatives.

Mike Hanlon: What is the exterior façade of the building and is the glass see through? Is the exterior the same for each building?

Stefan Behnisch: The glass will be clear. The exterior will not be the same for each building but each building will have the same character. Making each building a little different will keep it vivid and interesting so that the buildings can be seen as individual buildings and don't blend together.

Ray Mellone: Are the science buildings across from Charlesview? I'm wondering about the different densities on Western Avenue. The Spangler Center is set back far from the road. How close are the science buildings going to be to the side walk? Harvard should not make buildings with the frontage facing Cambridge. Our expectation is that Western Ave. is going to be a great street but it won't be great if the density on the street isn't balanced.

Kathy Spiegelman: The Master Plan will show the expectations for the densities of other building. The buildings will be denser on Western Ave. near the river and will get less dense as you travel toward the neighborhood.

Millie Hollum McLaughlin: The science complex looks like a series of boxes. What styles of architectural detail will be used. Will it be modern? Will it be a mixture?

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Stefan Behnisch: I don't do neo-Georgian architecture. That style of architecture doesn't work with lab buildings. It will look like a Harvard building but it will be modern. You can't apply any façade to any building. The façade is a functional element of the building. The types of materials that I have started looking at are stone, brick, glass (but not all glass), and light stones. No raw concrete.

Audience: Can you talk about the green belts that are reflected in your presentation?

Kathy Spiegelman: Those are a part of the Master Plan work, not the work produced by Stefan. We will have members of the Master Plan team come and update the Task Force on the Master Plan to explain the green belts further.

Audience: Will there be any specific approaches to storm water?

Stefan Behnisch: The buildings will handle storm water. We are striving to achieve LEED certification and we will go beyond what is usually done for Green buildings.

Chris Gordon: The entire Master Plan will have sustainable infrastructure components.

Kathy Spiegelman: Could the Task Force clarify their comments as to whether or not they want retail on the ground floor of the buildings?

Ray Mellone: I think the issue is how the traffic and parking is going to be affected. And it shouldn't be storage facilities.

Chris Gordon: I think the aim is to create active streets and a little bit of retail can help.

The Task Force moved to go into Executive Session and the public portion of the meeting ended at 7:30 p.m.